

Protect Yourself and Your Animals During Cold Weather

DOVER – Looks like winter has finally decided to arrive and the Division of Public Health (DPH) reminds people to prepare both themselves and their animals for freezing temperatures.

Hypothermia can occur in cold weather or if a person becomes chilled by rain. Infants and the elderly are particularly at risk, but anyone can be affected. Cold weather can put extra strain on the heart, so individuals with heart disease or high blood pressure should follow their doctors' advice about exerting themselves in the cold.

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It most often affects the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, or toes. Frostbite can permanently damage the body, and severe cases can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite increases for people with reduced blood circulation and among those who are not dressed properly for extremely cold temperatures.

Recognize the symptoms of frostbite:

At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin – frostbite may be beginning. Any of the following signs may indicate frostbite:

- a white or grayish-yellow skin area
- skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
- numbness

A victim is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissues are numb. If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care.

Prevent problems before they occur:

When heading out in cold weather, remember the following:

- Water-resistant or waterproof outerwear is advisable to reduce the risk of hypothermia (abnormally low body temperature). Dress in layers of loose-fitting clothes, including extra socks, which can be removed as they become damp. Wear warm, comfortable shoes.
- When exerting yourself, it is important to remain hydrated by drinking water and other non-caffeinated beverages.
- Wear hats, water-resistant coats, scarves or knit masks to cover the face and mouth, and gloves or mittens. Mittens are warmer than gloves.
- Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers of clothing will hold more body heat than cotton. Perspiration can increase heat loss, and wet clothing can chill the body rapidly.
- Avoid alcoholic or caffeinated beverages, which can cause the body to lose heat more rapidly.

For more information on cold weather preparation, visit: emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/.

Protect your pet during cold weather:

- Bring pets indoors. This is the safest place for your pet during cold temperatures. Short-haired pets or very young or old pets should never be left outdoors in cold temperatures and all pet dogs and cats should be brought indoors when the temperature falls below freezing.
- Protect outdoor pets from the elements. If your pet must be outdoors, you must provide a dry, draft-free shelter from the elements that contains moisture-resistant bedding such as straw or cedar shavings, which will help pets retain body heat. Housing should be appropriately sized for the animal and designed for animal sheltering. Pet owners should also provide a water-proof flap over the doorway to protect from wind and rain.
- Ensure access to water at all times. Frequently check water bowls to ensure water is not frozen. If you typically use a metal watering bowl, replace it with plastic as a pet's tongue

can get stuck to metal in cold temperatures.

- Additional food may be needed. Animals burn more calories in cold temperatures in order to stay warm, so you may need to increase the amount of food you provide. Check with your veterinarian about your pet's nutritional needs in cold weather.
- Outdoor cats need attention, too. Whether outdoor cats are owned, stray, or feral, they need the same protection from cold weather as your pets. If there are outdoor cats in your neighborhood, provide them with dry, warm shelter, as well as food and water to help them survive dangerously low temperatures. For your own safety, do not handle any unfamiliar animals, particularly if the rabies vaccination status is unknown. An animal may have rabies and not exhibit any external signs.

If you see a pet that has been left outdoors in cold temperatures without proper shelter or protection from the elements, food, or water, report it immediately to the Delaware Animal Services Hotline at 302-255-4646. In the City of Wilmington, call 302-654-5151.

Individuals seeking TTY services should call 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460. A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-disabled can use a TTY to type his/her conversation to a relay operator, who then reads the typed conversation to a hearing person at the DPH call center. The relay operator relays the hearing person's spoken words by typing them back to the TTY user. To learn more about translation services and TTY availability in Delaware, visit delawarerelay.com.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each

day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.